

ConCOVE Tūhura's submission on Future of Work-Based Learning Reforms

Introduction

ConCOVE Tūhura, the Construction and Infrastructure Centre of Vocational Excellence, has elected to provide feedback to the proposed changes to work-based learning. ConCOVE has 417 members, with 54% representing industry and a further 30% in vocational education and training.

As a centre dedicated to improving vocational education outcomes in the construction and infrastructure sectors, we have conducted extensive research that provides deep insights into the challenges and opportunities within New Zealand's VET system. Our evidence-based industry-first approach ensures that our responses are practical, have a positive impact, and reflect the voices of industry.

This is an exciting opportunity to create a shared vision for a future-ready vocational education ecosystem—one that truly aligns the needs of learners, employers and communities to ensure long-term success and sustainability. We emphasise the need for a learner-centred, employer-led approach with clear roles, an equity focus, and sustainable funding. The reform represents a unique opportunity to create a future-ready and sustainable vocational education ecosystem that genuinely prioritises learners and employers.

Key points

- **Learners at the centre:** The reform provides an opportunity to create clear, accessible pathways, ensuring learners know exactly where to go for support throughout their vocational journey.
- **Employer-led approach:** The reform presents an opportunity to ensure that employers are fully engaged and have a central role in shaping the future of vocational education, creating strong partnerships that drive success for both learners and employers
- **Māori and Pacific learners:** Tailored support for these learners will not only help improve outcomes but also contribute to a transformative system that empowers all learners to thrive.
- **Role clarity:** Clear, collaborative roles between providers and ISBs are essential to ensure smooth service delivery and the achievement of shared goals.
- **Funding stability:** A sustainable funding model will provide the foundation necessary for a successful and resilient transition, benefiting learners, employers, and communities. Indeed, a sustainable funding model must underpin any successful transition.

Summary feedback on proposed models

The table below shows our feedback on the benefits and costs on the proposed models.

Factor	Independent Model	Collaborative Model
Benefits for Employers	Simple, direct relationship with a training provider.	Structured industry involvement in training & support.
Benefits for Learners	Clear enrolment process, single provider for education & support.	Stronger industry connections, better qualification relevance.
Costs for Employers	Risk of weaker industry alignment, requiring retraining.	Higher compliance and admin costs if ISBs take on too much.
Costs for Learners	Risk of inconsistent pastoral care between providers.	Possible confusion from dealing with two entities (ISB + provider).
Risks for Employers	Industry loses direct control over training frameworks.	ISBs become bureaucratic, slowing skills adaptation.
Risks for Learners	Less initial disruption.	Learners fall through the cracks with two organisations delivering academic and non-academic support.
	Potential for Learners to fall through the cracks if provider support is weak.	Confusion for learners.
		Administrative complexity causes delays in programme completion.

Key insights from ConCOVE research

1. Learners thrive in environments where vocational pathways are clearly communicated, culturally responsive, and closely linked to industry realities.
2. Employers are more willing to engage when there are simple, well-supported mechanisms for contributing to learner development, including work-integrated learning opportunities.
3. Successful transitions depend on aligning educational experiences with workplace expectations from the outset.

Recommendations

1. **Integrated learner support:** a collaborative approach that integrates academic, pastoral care, and culturally relevant support is essential, particularly for Māori and Pacific learners.
2. **Stronger employer partnerships:** Industry must have an active and collaborative role in qualification design and delivery, ensuring relevance and sustainability for both employers and learners.

3. **National consistency:** Clear standards and quality assurance methods to ensure high-quality outcomes nationwide. A unified approach that integrates academic, pastoral care, and culturally relevant support is essential, particularly for Māori and Pacific learners.
4. **Sustainable funding:** Clear, reliable funding frameworks for providers and ISBs that provide the foundation for long-term success, enabling provider and ISBs to deliver high-quality education and training.
5. **Defined roles:** ISBs must focus on both standards-setting and fostering collaboration, ensuring the system remains adaptable, responsive and industry-driven.

Conclusion

This reform presents an opportunity to align learners and employers in a shared vision for the future, ensuring all voices are included and no stakeholder is left behind.

A learner-centred, employer-led vocational education system, with robust funding and clear accountability, will ensure work-based learning is future-ready and sustainable. ConCOVE Tūhura remains committed to contributing to a system that places learners, particularly Māori and Pacific learners, at its core and ensures strong employer partnerships for long-term success. Our wero to decision-makers is to recognise the clear need for ISBs to establish, grow and main relationships that focus on fostering collaboration and ensuring the system remains adaptable, responsive and industry-led.

Offer of support for future funding design

ConCOVE Tūhura is committed to supporting the Ministry in the design of future funding structures through our two ongoing projects, An Evaluation of Apprenticeship Policy Settings: A case for systems change and Research investigating funding sources, allocation mechanisms, and incentives in New Zealand's tertiary education system and makes recommendations about possible alternatives that support better outcomes. Our research and practical insights can play a key role in ensuring that funding frameworks are sustainable, equitable, and responsive to the needs of learners, employers, and the wider vocational education sector.

We request an opportunity to discuss these insights with Hon. Penny Simmonds and Officials at the earliest opportunity.



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